

## **Being There – where are women returners returning from?**

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### **Challenging gender**

Challenging gender can mean that both the concept and the material reality of gender pose a challenge to adult education theory and practice. This chapter challenges the gendered construction of time and space in adult education discourses of “Women Returners”, “Nouveaux Départs” or “Zweite Bildungsweg”. At the same time, challenging gender means interrogating the very notion of gender as a term that assumes clear distinctions between different kinds of human experience. Here, I write about *women* or *women’s experience* with reference to the state of affairs in which most, but not all, women, and some, but very few, men take on the bulk of domestic and caring work in human societies around the world. For this argument, I should include in the category of *women* any men who share these aspects of women’s experience, and exclude women who do not. This does not mean separating biological sex from cultural experience, but treating gender as an organising concept that is open, provisional and always subject to change. While asserting the need to employ the notion of “we as women...” for the political project of feminism, I also heed the warning that “...it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:276). This dilemma of gender and subjectivity parallels the tension that I explore in this chapter, which is about the desire to *be there* for others and the desire to escape the fixed location of one who is always *there*, to take flight from a single identity.

### **Signposts: is *being there* a time or a place?**

Caring for each other, caring for sick or vulnerable relatives, lovers and friends, caring for children, even when they are fully grown, means *being there*. What kind of space and time are implicated when we declare that a good friend is always *there* for us? If *being there* invokes the notion of *quality time*, does this suggest an intention to remain constant and unchanging? Does being *there* prevent us from being somewhere else, some other *place* we want, or need, to be? Where am I locating myself if I assert my duty or desire to *be there* for my children? In this chapter I tell a story about Jay, a woman for whom particular objects, places and people are combined in a life history to produce ways of knowing and being that I want to explore in relation to these questions. First I shall explain how Jay’s life history was produced in the course of a research project in which I used the life histories of eighteen women to deconstruct a particularly masculine conception of *liberation* in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Clarke, 1998). I go on to provide a brief summary of common values and childhood experiences shared by these eighteen women, and outline an epistemology of auto/biography as local, situated knowledge. Jay’s life history is then represented through selected episodes that allow me to relate the metaphorical construction of time and place in the notion of *being there* to the physical places produced in Jay’s narratives. The chapter concludes with some new questions that reflect my more recent interest in ideas from social geography, actor-network theory, and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. In a single chapter, I can do no more than briefly introduce these ideas and suggest ways in which they might enable us to think about the possibility for all of us to both *be there* and become different.

## Deconstructing domestication: the question of women's interests

In Britain, as in most of the world, the gendered distribution of domestic labour both supports, and is supported by, gendered inequalities in the wider labour market. In this context, women who take time out from paid work to care for dependants are assumed to lose the skills, attributes and dispositions which are required for public recognition in a successful career. When adult educators offer women a "Fresh Start" in order to "Return to Work" or to take a "Second Chance" at their education, there is an implicit suggestion that they have somehow gone astray, and need to set off again in the right direction. If we invite women to return to education or paid employment, where do we think they have been, and why do we invite them back to a place where they have been before?

In a study of the life histories of eighteen women living in a rural area of southern England during the late 1990s, I posed questions about the social expectations and desires, the complexity and ambivalence, associated with work, education and caring for dependants (Clarke, 1998). Underpinning that study was a feminist critique of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, in which I challenged the ways in which *liberation* is conceptualised in opposition to *domestication* as an educational goal (Freire, 1972a; Luke & Gore, 1992; hooks, 1993; Clarke 2002). The dilemmas and contradictions of this position became problematic for me when I began to reflect upon the goals and outcomes of courses called "Fresh Start for Women", which I was teaching in the early 1990s. The goal of a Freirean critical pedagogy is liberation through revolutionary action, based on a critical analysis of our own collusion in oppressive relationships and the discovery of our *true* interests. As a mother, my own experience includes that of making choices about work, education and caring for others that may appear to be against my interests. These interests, however, comprise a constantly shifting and often conflicting jumble of needs, wishes and desires, none of which are more *true* than any others.

I adopted a feminist deconstructive approach to this problem (Grosz, 1993; Elam, 1994; Nash, 1994), which means foregrounding the subordinate term in the binary opposition of liberation/domestication. So I decided to look at educational experiences from a standpoint which gives prominence to women's *domestication*, not in order to reverse the opposition and privilege domestication above liberation, but to open up the way for new ways of thinking about caring and social life. Thus the focus of my study was on the biographies of women who have regarded themselves as primarily responsible for the care of others and yet whose aspirations involve some form of continuing education.

Quantitative studies of educational participation construct categories like "family responsibilities" as obstacles that get in the way of educational pursuits. In my study, on the other hand, "family responsibilities" were accorded the same value and importance as work outside the home and educational activities. Through a variety of classes in colleges and adult education centres in the rural area where I had been living and working, I found eighteen women who were all part-time workers with "family responsibilities". One woman cared for an elderly parent and one had a chronically sick husband while all the others had dependant children. All these women had left school with few or no formal qualifications, and their ages ranged between late 20s and mid-50s. These women had chosen to continue their education despite facing all the barriers most commonly identified as those that prevent participation in continuing education.<sup>1</sup>

With each of the women I conducted three hour-long interviews, each covering the same chronology, from childhood memories to future aspirations. But each interview had a different focus – on work, education or domestic life. The women were given the interview questions in advance, and were asked to select topics they would like to talk about. Some women chose to provide written responses as well as an oral account, which was tape-recorded and transcribed. Copies of transcripts were sent back to the interviewees, who chose fictitious names for themselves and anyone else who featured in their narratives. In the following account, I refer to these women as “members” of a group, and present a summary of their early lives, in order to provide a cultural context for selected aspects of Jay’s life history. This group biography constructs a composite picture to which no individual in the group conforms. However, each of the women would recognise aspects of their own experience in the general story.

### **Eighteen women: a group biography**

The stories and memories from earlier generations feature tales of poverty and hardship, in which children were treated in ways that would now be regarded as unacceptably negligent, violent or cruel. A strong work ethic pervades the stories from members' own childhood as well as that of their parents. Members excused parental absence, and sometimes neglect, if either or both parents were out earning money, despite a widespread belief that, ideally, mothers should stay home with their children for as long as possible.

Fathers were expected to earn the primary wage and their work was generally seen as interesting and important. The work of the two professional mothers, teacher and nurse, was also a source of pride to their daughters, particularly as the working hours enabled them also to “be there” for their children in the way that mothers were expected to be. Although twelve other mothers went out to work when members were children, their jobs were often temporary or part-time and never regarded by their daughters as good or desirable. All but one of the members, even those brought up mainly by their fathers, associated feeling cared for with the presence of a mother, or female substitute, often attending to their bodily needs in times of illness.

School was generally experienced as a place to pass the time through the childhood years, although it was also seen, at least momentarily, as a site of new and interesting possibilities. Parents insisted that if children worked hard and did well at school, they would have wider opportunities for wealth, status and fulfilment in adult life. The hopes raised by such promises were dashed for most members at the age of eleven or twelve, when they were assessed and classified as failures or confirmed as nobody special, and often consigned to the lower streams of a ‘secondary modern’ school.<sup>2</sup> These pupils may well have conformed to the characteristics of those perceived by teachers as the “faceless bunch”, a term coined by Michelle Stanworth to describe those low-achieving, unassertive girls who sit quietly at the back of the classroom (Stanworth, 1981). Their images of well-educated adults were of affluent men, dressed for indoor work, or of unattractive and “unfeminine” women (Clarke, 1997). Raymond Williams comments on the remarkable fact that, after a century of universal education in Britain, the word *educated* is generally applied only to an elite. He notes that,

There is a strong class sense in this use, and the level indicated by **educated** has been continually adjusted to leave the majority of people who have received an education below it (Williams (1976) 1988:112).

In their career aspirations, members gradually came to accept prevailing views about "women's work" and left school to take up low-status jobs in clerical, catering or retail services. All eighteen members were married, or living with a man, by the age of twenty. One was pregnant at sixteen, three were married at seventeen, seven at eighteen, and the other seven at nineteen or twenty.

As a form of cultural history, this biographical summary presents a picture of conformity with the expectations and life-styles of many, if not most, working class women in rural areas of Southern England between the 1950s and 1980s. In 1995, all the members were primarily responsible for the care of one or more dependants, and they all worked in part-time jobs outside the home. What marks these women out as special, as quite extraordinary in the light of their mainly unsatisfactory school experiences and their childhood impressions of well-educated adults, is that when we met they were all actively participating in organised further education. Furthermore, all of them intended to continue engaging in educational activities, in one form or another, for the rest of their lives. This apparent discontinuity between members' prior experiences of education and their current interests suggests points of resistance and change that I explored through a more detailed analysis of narrative extracts from the life histories of six of the women.

I transcribed these extracts using a framework which illuminates the poetic structure of oral narratives (Gee, 1985; 1991). This is illustrated below, in Jay's story of "Poet's Corner". Representing the narratives in this way enabled members to treat their stories as works of fiction when we came together to discuss them in a series of group meetings. When we tell stories about our lives we construct these within larger narratives or discourses which provide criteria for evaluating the actions of, for example, the good mother, the serious student or the enterprising worker. Critically reviewing the stories that had been transcribed from our interviews enabled these women to consider other possible directions or courses of action which the central characters might have taken. This was not a question of seeing the error of their ways, but of seeing how their identities are constructed through multiple, changing and often contradictory discourses of work, education and domestic life. An account of my approach to the analysis, interpretation and representation of this data is included with the extracts from Jay's life history below. But first I want to explain how a study of the life histories of this particular group of women enabled me to produce a kind of knowledge that does not claim to be universal or even true.

### **Auto/biography as local, situated knowledge**

The idea that biography is always also auto/biography is derived from Liz Stanley's argument that, traditionally, both rely on textual strategies which conceal the author's construction of a character, a life or a self (Stanley, 1992). Breaking with this tradition of concealment means acknowledging how my own particular interests framed the questions I asked, the stories people told me, and the ways in which I have chosen to represent them.

Paul Ricoeur argues that all human actions have a narrative structure (before anybody represents them in a story) in the sense that we do things in relation to a possible future based on our interpretation of the past (Ricoeur, 1984; 1986). This means that life-history and historical narrative should be approached as literary text and, instead of asking what kinds of knowledge a narrative can yield, we should be asking what kind of role narrative plays in the structure of human existence. In Ricoeur's view, for example, narrative functions as a human response to feelings of discord and fragmentation in relation to time. Elspeth Probyn links

conceptions of time and place in metaphors of locale, location and local in order to "...emphasize both the spatial and temporal significance of how we come to know" (Probyn, 1990:178). Locale represents the spaces we occupy in the broad sense suggested by Dorothy Smith's term, "modes of organisational consciousness" (Smith, 1987). Location represents our positioning in the temporal sequence of Foucault's "regimes of truth", that allow some statements to be made only when other statements have already been established as knowledge. Knowledges derived from experiences in the private locale of the home, for example, are generally cast outside the location of "true" or "scientific" knowledge. These metaphors of locale and location are brought together in a view of the local as a "...fragmented set of possibilities that can be articulated into a momentary politics of time and place" (Probyn, 1990:187).

Each time that I re-present aspects of this research – in a doctoral thesis, a conference paper or in this chapter – I do not want readers to ask "Is this true?" Instead, I want you to ask, "What does this mean for me?" as you reflect on what happens to you when you read this text (Latour, 1988). Criteria for a more objective evaluation of this local, situated knowledge can be related to my ethical commitment to "...a sense of care and concern to understand the 'other's possibility' (Tierney, 1994:105) and to feminism as a broadly political perspective on the world (Nash, 1994). The interests that informed my life-history research in the late 1990s were directly related to a feminist critique of the concept of liberation in critical pedagogy. I argued that liberation, for Paulo Freire, requires the agency of a rational, unfettered individual who travels the road of progress through linear time. Liberation, in this view, is not compatible with the notion of *being there* for others, which suggests a readiness to lay down our tools, to put aside our work, to deviate from a plan, a timetable, a competing set of needs, wishes or demands. I would not accept that, in articulating a need to *be there*, the women in my study were simply domesticated creatures "...who intend to make the future repeat the present..." (Freire, 1972b:41). But my representation and analysis of their life stories does not result in assertions about who these women really are, what they really want or what kind of adult education we should offer them.

The stories certainly support the continuing arguments for a more equitable distribution of domestic labour, and, since this has not yet been achieved, I am constantly seeking new ways to articulate the complexity and ambivalence of our interests and desires. Thus, my current interest in returning to these stories comes from a fascination with theories that engage with this complexity by taking account of our relationship with the material world. These provide new perspectives to illuminate relations between knowing, doing and being in time and space, and I shall introduce these in relation to Poet's Corner, the story with which I conclude the following extracts from Jay's life history.

### **You give up your life**

When I met Jay, she had a part-time secretarial job at the local naval base where her husband, Alan, also worked. The older of their two sons had just gone to university and the naval base was shortly to be closed. Alan had secured a job in a city where the family had lived some years ago, so they would soon be moving house and Jay would be looking for another job. Ten years earlier, Jay had battled to get Alan's agreement for her to take a full-time job. He eventually agreed, but after a year, Jay decided to reduce her working hours in order to "be there" when her sons came home from school. Now that her sons were almost grown up, Jay could think about working full-time again, but she was no longer sure that she wanted to do that, since Alan would expect her to do all the domestic work as well. She said,

I think when you go out to work full time you do virtually give up your life to it because, by the time you've done that work, and, if you've got children as well, you've got no life left really, have you. I wouldn't be without my children, but I think you virtually give up your life when you get married, don't you... I mean as soon as you've got your husband and he's there, it's almost like you take over as his mother isn't it, in a lot of ways... I'm not being nasty like, I'm not moaning about it, I mean we have some good - you have some good times don't you when you have your children. It's all... good stuff thinking back.

The ambivalence in this passage is clearly signalled by the shifts between the subjective "I", the indeterminate "we" and the universal "you" in Jay's assertions about what it means to be a wife and mother. While the "life" which Jay talks about giving up is clearly something other than mothering, it is also something you lose if you "go out to work full time". So what is this life that Jay feels she has given up?

Jay's account of her childhood gave the impression of a cold, repressive, and socially isolated family. Parental expectations for Jay and her older sister were limited to wage earning for the benefit of family finances until they should leave home to get married. When she left school at the age of fifteen with no qualifications, Jay got an office job, and immediately enrolled for evening classes in typing. Jay said that she enjoyed writing, particularly with a word processor, and she provided extensive written responses for each of my questionnaires. In her accounts of various office jobs, Jay often referred to the pleasure and satisfaction she derived from the physical production of a nicely bound document, a neatly wrapped parcel, or a cleanly typed page of text.

### **Seeing how the other half lived**

Jay continued to work after she was married, but left her job when she was expecting her first child. When her second child was about four years old, Jay started to take on part-time cleaning jobs and did machine sewing at home. Although these jobs represent "downward mobility" in a hierarchical labour market, this was a happy period in Jay's life, when she was able to enjoy the friendship and mutual support of other women. Several other members of the research group described similar periods of early motherhood in which close friendships were formed and there seemed to be plenty of time, as Sylvia expressed it, "...to go shopping, play badminton, take the children to the park and just be women". For Sylvia, and possibly for Jay, there is a congruence between this shared experience of care, work and pleasure, and fulfilling social expectations of what it means to "just be women", that is not disrupted by part-time employment in menial jobs. While sensitive to the low social value accorded to work that enables us to "just be women", this is often a period in which we can reflect on other kinds of "life" we might lead and another kind of "person" we might aspire to become. For Jay, this was expressed most vividly when she told me about one of her cleaning jobs. Her employer was a well-known film director, and Jay said,

I was often alone when I was there, and it was here that I became aware of my deep fascination for books. Here they had a fabulous old-fashioned library, and I can remember seeing it and... aghast, you know, how lovely. The wooden shelves surrounded and completely filled the room. Each shelf was stacked with every sort of book imaginable... and I always... if I was on my own, sneaked in there... I had to dust this library, so when I went in there I always took a moment to browse through the collection and... have a little peep, and sometimes I could hardly get back to my cleaning.

Jay elaborated on this account of the surroundings in our group meeting, saying how wonderful it must be for their children to grow up in that sort of environment, "...and it was just seeing how the other half lived".

### **A proper job**

This glimpse of "how the other half lived", emphasised the low status of cleaning work and, when both the children were at school, Jay decided it was time to return to work in an office. She saw an advertisement for a local part-time job as a teleprinter operator, which she wanted to apply for. But Alan, discouraged her from applying as,

He didn't mind me doing all the other jobs because he knew that it wasn't that same responsibility, like I could have phoned up and say I'm not going, you know. But this job was a proper job. Someone would have had to have covered for the children... I felt like, with friends and everything, I could have done it. But he wasn't of that opinion... I had to forget it.

But Jay certainly never forgot this, and mentioned it in all three interviews. The incident strengthened Jay's resolve to return to office work, but she said, "I remember feeling quite anxious about modern office practices and about meeting people as a person again rather than a 'Mum'". So Jay enrolled on a two-day "Women Returners" course and attended classes at the local Technical College in basic word processing. Soon afterwards, Jay's husband was transferred to a job at the naval base, and the family moved to the small town on the South Coast where Jay and I met ten years later. Jay took on a full-time office job, and this time she secured her husband's consent, arranging "cover for the children" after school with a professional care agency.

When Jay wanted a "proper job", she was talking about a job that could not be combined with *being there* for her children, since somebody else would have to "cover" that role. This suggests that *being there* is more than spending time with others or being in a place with them, since, for Jay, it means losing her identity as "a person". But after a year of working full-time and getting no domestic support from her husband, Jay realised that being a person *and* a Mum means "you do virtually give up your life to it". So she reverted to part-time hours, but, with the threat of the impending closure of the naval base, Jay also enrolled in adult education classes in order to "update qualifications", "enhance job prospects" and "keep abreast of modern technology".

### **Poet's Corner**

As well as achieving vocational qualifications in business administration, Jay had also achieved the highest possible grade in a more academic course, which included the study of English literature. Jay told me that this course had "opened up a whole new world" for her, and this was when she told the story of Poet's Corner, which reminded me of the story of the film director's library because of its powerful evocation of a place where knowledge resides. This time, however, Jay is not creeping around with her duster, but she stands firmly in a place where she experiences a "wonderful feeling" of knowing...

### JAY'S STORY : POET'S CORNER

#### I stood there

1. When I went to LONDON one day/ we went in to POET'S CORNER/ in WESTMINSTER ABBEY
2. And there was this PLAQUE on the floor
3. And I STOOD THERE / and I said to Alan LOOK AT THAT
4. I said I know what that MEANS

#### A Wonderful Feeling

5. And it was all this OLD ENGLISH (*laughs*)/and I'd actually DONE IT in the English class you know
6. And it was such a WONDERFUL FEELING/  
that I could STAND THERE / and READ those things/ and know what they MEANT

This transcription draws on James Gee's poetic framework for the analysis of spoken narratives (Gee, 1985; 1991).<sup>3</sup> Poetry can be distinguished from the prose of fiction or biography because, in poetry, "the words get in the way" (Kermode, 1980:80). In his recognition of the poetic features of spoken narratives, Gee draws our attention to the words that "get in the way", while retaining a focus on the narrative structure as a whole. This enables the interpreter to follow linguistic clues to explore some of the potential meanings in the narrative without trying to fix on a single or final explanation. Although I do not intend to embark on a detailed linguistic analysis of this story here, I include this transcription because the capitalised focus words draw our attention to a powerful sense of being in a place. These are words that Jay herself emphasised in the telling of this story, in which she re-creates the same sense of awe and wonderment that she expressed in her story of the film director's library. In the earlier story she "sneaked in" for "a little peep" into a place where "the other half lived". Ten years later, in Westminster Abbey, Jay STOOD THERE as a knowing subject who could READ obscure texts because she had DONE IT in the English class.

These two stories offer clues about the "life" that Jay saw herself as renouncing when she got married, and the "person" she wanted to be "rather than a Mum". What is the significance of place in these stories? How are objects, people, other times and places brought together in the networks that attribute particular meanings to these moments in a life history? How is *being there* reconciled with a desire to try out new identities, explore new ways of being?

### **Being and becoming: opening up the networks of time and space**

The particular place that we experience in the story of Poet's Corner is produced in the circumstances of its telling (the encounter between Jay and me), in the narrative structure of the text, and in an open-ended "dialogue between story and interpretation" (Kermode, 1980:82). Throughout the transcripts of Jay's life history interviews, there are references to places – homes, gardens, offices, bus routes, neighbourhoods, schools. All these places can be conceptualised as the product of social relations which constitute their boundaries, functions and physical qualities in "... a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation" that Doreen Massey refers to as a kind of "power-geometry" (1994:265). In this web of social relations, the thread that Jay and I spun to connect our respective differences of class and education must be acknowledged as a factor in the production of each story. As an adult educator, it is easy for me to read Poet's Corner as the kind of epiphany story that helps me to feel good about the work that I do. In this reading, Jay's "wonderful feeling" would be the culmination of a desire, a point of arrival at the place to which, as a "Woman Returner", she had been invited to return. But, this is not a place that Jay has stood in before. Nor is this the kind of knowledge that Jay said she wanted

when she enrolled in adult education classes to “enhance job prospects” and “keep abreast of modern technology”. The Old English that Jay could now read represents the kind of knowledge which was offered in English grammar schools, to which she had been denied access at the age of eleven. It is the knowledge of an elite “educated” class, that “other half” whose material and cultural goods Jay glimpsed when she “sneaked in” to clean the film director’s library.

Jay did not become aware of her “deep fascination for books” while engaged in organised education. It was a discovery she made at a time in her life when *being there* for her children and enjoying the physical and social pleasures of motherhood in a community of women, confined her to the status of “Mum”. Jay contrasted this with the identity of “person” which, in the absence of gender marking, admits the attributes of masculinity, power and knowledge. There is a sense of either/or in these identities, which suggests we can’t be in more than one place at the same time, and that new identities can only be forged by repressing those we inhabited before. This dichotomy is supported in a view of adult education that treats “family responsibilities” as an obstacle to learning, rather than as a source of knowledge. I want to conclude this chapter by introducing some perspectives that might enable us to extend the dimensions of *being there* in both time and space. The goal is neither the connected but confining status of “Mum”, nor the autonomy of the disembodied “person”, but the production of new identities that combine the unlimited possibilities of *becoming* with what Zygmunt Bauman describes as the “warmth and agony of being with others” (1996:19).

From social geography, I have come to appreciate the idea that places do not simply provide a ready-made back-cloth against which social life is performed. Doreen Massey (1994: 167) challenges geographers who set up the idea of Being in a place as a (feminine) desire for constancy and stasis, in opposition to Becoming in time as a (masculine) striving for progress. Instead of separating Being in Space from Becoming in Time, Massey proposes a conceptualisation of both space and time as “constantly in the process of being made” *through* the social (Massey, 1999:262). This is an open and dynamic conception of space, linked to a historical notion of time with an open view of the future, unlike those stories of progress and development in which ‘... the future is already foretold’ (Massey, 1999: 272). An adult education programme that explores the places we produce in the representation of our life histories would enable us to trace the ideas, experiences and social relations that invest these places with particular values. Places matter (materially), and it matters how we think about the places where people have come from, and where they want to be.

This is not to argue that places are produced in a one-way process of social construction, and actor-network theory offers a perspective that recognises the extent to which places can also be constituted as actors in the production of “knowing locations” (Law & Hetherington, 2001). In this view, places derive their particular attributes in networks of relations with people, technologies, furniture, animals, plants and any other material entities (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987; Law & Hassard, 1999). Thus, the very humanity of human beings is an effect of the networks through which we derive “human” attributes in relation to other human and non-human entities. This is what John Law describes as relational materialism.

The argument is that thinking, acting, writing, loving, earning – all the attributes that we normally ascribe to human beings, are generated in networks that pass through and ramify both within and beyond the body. Hence the term actor-network – an actor is also, always, a network (Law: 1992:384).

The materialism of this position is in the idea that even abstract entities like power, space, gender, love or the global economy are materially embodied in social, conceptual, technical or textual forms, and these can be observed empirically as network effects. In Jay's story of Poet's Corner, we can observe the effects of networks that connect poetry with religion and history, according power and status to an esoteric text engraved on the plaque where Jay stood. Westminster Abbey, London, the train, bus or car that brought her there, the long-dead scribes who engraved the plaque, the scholars who translate the words and the person who polishes the brass on which they are inscribed, each of these are entities that produce particular effects in a network. And Jay's husband is enrolled here, as witness to her act of knowing, "Look at that", she said to him, "I know what that means". And the English class, a network of teachers and other students, each with their different investments in the curriculum, processes and relations of adult education, are also enrolled as actors in the network where Jay is located as both producer and consumer of knowledge. Analysis of the ways in which people, objects and texts are brought together in such networks helps us to recognise the contingency of knowledge and the multiple spaces and times that are invoked in any "knowing location".

Another way to conceptualise the possibility of occupying multiple spaces and identities is through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblage. This refers to the symbiotic relationship between content and expression, in which "Content is not a signified, nor expression a signifier; rather, both are variables of the assemblage" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:91). These variables comprise, on the one hand, the "machinic assemblage of desire" in which bodies, actions and passions are mingled in particular relationships in the material world and, on the other, the "collective assemblage of enunciation". The latter refers to the words, acts, statements that transform the corporeal world in a particular "regime of signs". The language and signs available for us to represent mothering, for example, orders how we can think about the materiality of bodies, clothes, food or homes, or the ways in which "needs" are constructed in a process of interpretation and judgement in a particular "mothering culture" (Everingham, 1994:7). This notion of *order* combines both the sense of classifying and that of commanding so that in any "collective assemblage of enunciation" we are simultaneously implicated in the creation of order and the exercise of power. The task of adult educators who want to open the way for both being and becoming is to disrupt the ordering of our bodies, and the identities available to us in a "regime of signs". This means recognising that,

"Direct discourse is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; but the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 84).

Jay, and the other women who told me their stories in 1997 are no longer there, and nor am I, in that time and place. Their stories are no more than "detached fragments" from a "constellation of voices", to which I have added my own. I have concluded by offering the merest glimpse of some complicated and difficult ideas that might help to illuminate the complexity of women's lives, and open up the possibilities for synthesis and change through different conceptions of place and time. My own relationship to the ideas that I have touched upon here is not unlike Jay's experience of awe when confronted by the vast array of books in the film director's library. I am fascinated and intrigued by the possibilities they offer, the new worlds they open up, but have been able to do no more than sneak around and "have a little peep". I pointed out earlier that a more equitable distribution of domestic labour between woman and men is still a long way from being achieved. One contribution that educators can make towards a "moral ecology of

care” (Benn, 1998) is to think beyond the possible and seek a reconciliation between the freedom of *becoming*, and the production of time and space for *being there* as a form of care for all of us.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> British and international surveys on motivation and participation in continuing education offer us various typologies of "non-participants", all of which include people who: have a significant responsibility for the care of dependant/s; are engaged in additional part-time work outside the home; left school with few or no formal qualifications; live in rural areas (McGivney, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> In England, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, examinations at the age of 11+ were used to select 20% of the population for an academic education in "grammar schools", leaving the other 80% to start their secondary schooling with an experience of educational failure.

<sup>3</sup> You can replicate the way Jay told me the story of Poet's Corner if you read it aloud, and:

- ignore the underlined headings (which have been added during the process of interpretation)
- stress the capitalised FOCUS words
- pause or change pitch between each *idea unit* (/)
- take a breath at the end of each numbered line

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